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ABSTRACT

The special problems faced by black women in sports and in American society are discussed. Ways of bringing about change in social attitudes and in interaction between the races and the sexes are considered. Special emphasis is placed on the need to develop a sense of worth and an understanding of the basic social structures which breed racial and sexual discrimination. (JD)

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Philosophical Bases of Women in Sport

Minority Women in Sport Conference
NAGWS, AIAW and Howard University 1980

I believe the creator has given each of us a specific span of time, a specific array of gifts and foibles, and a specific life circumstance; all for a simple and profound purpose. We are to both find and create our authentic selves. We reach inward to discover naive talents; we reach outward to choose processes of self-perfecting which enable us to draw closer to the far limits of potentiality.

The finding and creating of authenticity requires freedom. There is no discovery without the freedom to search. There is no choosing nor creating without options to be rejected or embraced. To be held without freedom is to be held in bondage; is to be a slave. In the simple moral system I have outlined, the state of existing without freedom is never a proper state for a functioning human being. This is a truism to which surely all but the most perverse must subscribe. What isolates us from one another is our differing understandings of the forms enslavement can take and our differing understandings of the actions needed to gain freedom.

It is instructive to review here the work of Dr. Pauli Murray, recipient of law degrees from Howard University, University of California at Berkeley, and Yale University. Dr. Murray has since earned a divinity degree, and is an episcopal priest.

Murray, in an article in the Anglican Theological Review views with concern the degree of schism between the black and feminist liberation movements. She states that while "these are the two most important theologies of liberation in the United States. . . there is an undeclared war brewing between them." (p. 19) She points to the historical parallel in the 19th century when "women leaders who supported the abolition of slavery became

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alienated after the Civil War as they saw their own concerns shunted aside by white male legislatures who extended suffrage to black males only." (p. 19) She warns that this can happen again unless the trap is avoided.

"The interstructuring of oppression by sex, race and class creates intermediate tensions and alienations. . .Each group tends to suppress the experience of its racial and sexual counterpart. The black movement talks as though 'blacks' meant black males. In doing so it conceals the tension between black males and females. The women's movement fails to integrate the experience of black women and poor women and so fails to see that much of what it means by 'female experience' is confined to those women within the dominant class and race." (20)

We must transcend our differing understandings of enslavement and its resolution.

To be held without freedom requires a holder, personified in the master, but buttressed by a cultural ideology which legitimates supremacy and inferiority. The question "who is master; who is slave?" has had a terrible and unmistakable meaning in the history of this country and any improved future must take that past into account. Additionally, I believe we can benefit from the exercise of questioning every human relationship based upon an assumed supremacy-inferiority configuration. Of particular importance to us are relationships between women and men.

The mirror which black culture has held before all of us has intensified the sense of abhorance felt about master-slave relations no matter how

beneficent the control is intended to be. For example, consider Porgy in George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess, the opera based on W. E. B. DuBois' Souls of Black Folks. Porgy, in one of the lovliest pieces of American lyric opera, asserts "Bess you is my woman now." His love is real; but could not the same words have been uttered by a white overseer? Could not the words have been uttered by any male to a white Bess?

A woman "owned or kept" in any way, shape, or form, is a woman in bondage; without the freedom of important life options. People "belong to one another" only by mutual giving and in continual renewal.

The coming to awareness or consciousness-raising of the discrepancy between the rightful state of freedom in which we should exist and the limited options actually available is often accompanied by rage; what Barbara Deming has called exquisite, redeeming, rage. This rage seems usually directed towards "The Masters" . . be they white, male or both. This sense of rage or outrage seems to me, inevitable and valuable but it must be transcended lest it eat alive the outraged one. Primarily this is because at the base of that rage is a sense of being victimized; of being powerles. This is not a true state. A functioning human being is never totally without power. Wherever we have been enslaved, we have in some way given assent. We have allowed the condition to develop or persist.

These statements are not intended as indictments of the two (to some extent) disadvantaged groups I wish to deal with today; blacks and women. I wish only to emphasize that if the pattern of master-slave, supremacy-inferiority, relations is to be broken, it is most probably the enslaved who must first resolve; "this must change; you (master) and I (slave) must change."

In this I am merely paraphrasing the non-violent, civil disobediance philo sophy of the black civil rights movement and that of pacifist Barbara Deming. In exemplifying this I again cite Pauli Murray speaking of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "For him, non-violence was not a capitulation to weakness and fear; rather non-violence demanded that difficult kind of steadfastness which can endure indignation with dignity. For King, non-violence always attempted to reconcile and establish a relationship rather than humiliate the opponent. For him, non-violence was always directed against the evil rather than against the person responsible for the evil." (p. 13)

The rage is not mitigated, but transformed into positive energy and power when we accept our past unwitting complicity in the master-slave relationship and determine that we all must change.

Thus, to me, the creation and effectuation of planned change is a pre-eminent life goal. For me, it is a part of my personal search for authentic self. I think you would not be here if you did not share with me in this.

A serious danger can befall us in this quest and it is a consideration of this danger upon which I will focus in the time remaining to me. When an individual, each one of us, becomes aware of the ways in which circumstance (including other individuals) limit our options and growth; and when we determine to change circumstance; and when we possess talent, perseverance, ambition; there is a liklihood that the change we bring about is to become master, rather than slave. Yes, we find our own power and exercise it over others without their consent. To borrow the concept of psychiatrist-theorist Paul Watzlawick, this is first-order change. . .a re-ordering within the system which leaves the basic operation of the system intact.

I can hear the more pragmatic among our number calling "Yes — Let me become Master' then I can re-structure the system". I'm sceptical about whether this works. . .whether the new Master can be expected to complete the re-ordering of the system. . .but my mind is still open to this in one respect at least; the re-structure of the system is acknowledged as primary goal. That re-structuring of the operating rules of a system is what Watzlawick would call second-order change.

Thus 2nd-order change is our mutual goal and more specifically. . . second-order change in the world of sport and athletics.

Watzlawick describes two serious blocks to 2nd order change. The first is the denial that a problem exists; denial that fundamental change is needed. With regard to the limited options for women in sport, the dominant response of the institutionalized establishment of sport over the past decade has been a denial that a problem exists. Watzlawick states that anyone or any group which insists that a problem exists, in the face of such denials, is labeled either mad or bad. Women (as individuals) and AIAW (as a group) have been castigated as mad, bad or both for insisting that Title IX was a necessary step in remedying some systematic problems in the sports world.

Likewise black women have met resistance from many quarters when they have insisted that being <u>black and female</u> posed special problems and challenges. "You don't have any problems that we don't have" comes the response from many white sports women with the implied injunction that it's mad or bad to "separate" concerns in this manner. Denial that a problem exists blocks second-order change.

So also does the requirement that no solution be utilized for a problem until the perfect solution is possible. Watzlawick calls this the "utopia syndrome." If problem denial has been the dominant response of the male sport establishment which blocks effective change then surely the Utopia Syndrome has been the dominant response of the female physical education-sport establishment, at least up to the mid-1960's. The philosophical basis for women's sport has been rather clearly identified since the 1930's For example, I imagine many of us remember being taught the importance of that triangle priority system: 1st-instruction in sport for all; 2nd- intramural sport for most; 3rd- elite sport for the few. In this priority system -- and in other respects I will mention in a moment — the philosophical basis was a utopian solution to problems in the sporting would and no partial solutions were acceptable. For a long time, no second-order change was brough about by women physical education and sport leaders.

But then came the effective civil rights movements of the 60's. We learned some techniques for dealing with sexism and racism in sport at the individual level of the bigot; at the institutional level in organization like the NCAA, AIAW, USOC; and at the cultural level where ideologies of supremacy/inferiority underlie entire system organization.

This "system and self perfecting"which we have learned is barely begun but I think we must never-endingly keep reminding ourselves of the 2nd order change imperative. We must not allow ourselves to be satisfied to become the "new masters". The creation of AIAW; the creation of a powerful black and/or minority caucus within AIAW; Title IX regulations; the Amateur Athletic Act; do not mandate second-order change. They allow us to become NEW masters of the old system.

We desire to move from the periphery of the sport social structure to its center while insisting on the validity of our view of the sporting experience rather than adopting the presently dominant view of the sport experience.

Our view of the sporting experience, in the past called 'women's sport', which I would call now "the expressive elements of sport" include at least three traditional dimensions and can be perfected by incorporating an over-riding dimension extracted from the black cultural experience.

From traditional women's sport framework:

1. the inherent worth of sporting experience for all, for each at her/his ability level;
2. the inherent value of both women's and men's involvement in all aspects of sport (as teacher, trainer, coach, administrator, official as well as participant);
3. sports purpose is for the good (that is the development) of those who play, thus we find
   a. continual involvement of the player-athletic in the planning conduct, evaluation of the experience
   b. sport experience in balance with other areas of life
   c. sport experience which is humane, non-exploitive, intrinsically oriented.

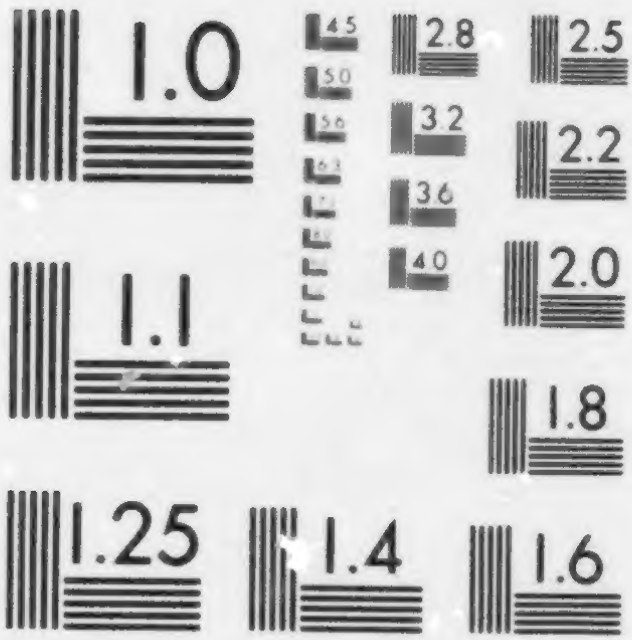
This view of the sport experience I think is completely compatible with, and potentially expanded by, concepts about the sport experience emanating from black sports theorists like Harry Edwards, Mal Andrews and artists like Ntasake Shange. These writers speak of the ultimate importance to the black performer of style, authenticity, autonomy. . . to be owned and controlled by no one; to be in one's performance, only one's self and for one's self.

We are moving and being moved from the periphery to the mainstream. The pressures to assent to the exxagerated dominant value structure may seem inexorable; to accommodate, to stop short of the 2nd order change goal--which I

identify as being the end to domination oriented thinking. Certainly the achievement of the goal state is a utopia but if we know where we are going, even the smallest steps forward can be cause for celebration.

In closing, particularly I appeal to those in this audience who are female and black: to continue the examination of your life experiences; identify the threads running through them of style, authenticity, strength, sensitivity and nurturance; value them and share them (whether wanted or not by those around you) in whatever form is yours; in stories, in performing, in formal speeches or in research.

You are needed. I make a pledge to you, and I think by this conference and in other ways, the AIAW and NAGWS organization's pledge to you, to do what is possible to see that you are heard.



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